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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000550

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TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: LEBANESE FORCES MP DESCRIBES LEBANON'S
"DELICATE EQUILIBRIUM"

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) MP George Adwan, who represents Lebanese Forces leader Samir Ja'ja' in inter-communal negotiations, said much of the rhetoric coming from Michel Aoun and Samir Ja'ja' concerning the tenure of President Lahoud is irresponsible and dangerous. Adwan believes the inexperience and excessive emotional involvement of Saad Hariri has complicated matters and set in motion an unnecessary countdown. He still believes a "calm and reasonable" solution is possible, but the wild card remains Michel Aoun, who is indicating by public comments that he will do almost anything to prevent the presidency from going to a rival. In Adwan's opinion, the key to a peaceful resolution is the Maronite patriarch, Boutros Sfeir, whose status in the community even Aoun would hesitate to challenge. End summary.

2. (C) MP George Adwan met with the Ambassador and poloff on February 22 at his office in East Beirut. Adwan, a former leader in the Maronite Tanzeen militia during Lebanon's civil war and now a trusted member of the Lebanese Forces political bloc, moves easily between the various political figures in Lebanon. He is considered one of the closest advisors to LF leader Samir Ja'ja', but has enough confidence that he voices differences with his political boss without much apparent concern. In recent days, he has maintained close communication with Aoun, Hariri, Sfeir, Jumblatt, and Ja'ja'.

RECKLESS STATEMENTS

3. (C) Adwan agreed that recent comments by Michel Aoun and Samir Ja'ja' had recklessly increased sectarian tensions in advance of next month's Hariri-inspired deadline for Lahoud to leave office. (Note: Ja'ja' apparently reverted to his militia mindset when he called Lahoud's attention to the fate of Romania's former leader Ceausescu, while Aoun has threatened to meet any demonstration with forceful counter-demonstrations, declaring, "...the people of Baabda (Aoun's supporters) will not let them (March 14 demonstrators) approach.")

4. (C) Adwan said he had warned Ja'ja' to "calm down," or he would dissipate all the goodwill the LF leader had built up in the Christian community from his 11-year imprisonment. Concerning the situation in Baabda palace, Adwan maintained that President Lahoud's son, Emile Lahoud, had just returned from consultations in Damascus and had issued instructions to the presidential guard to meet any demonstrators with force. And finally, Aoun had reportedly

agreed with Hizballah's Hassan Nasrallah that if Aoun's supporters were unable to turn back anti-Lahoud demonstrations, Hizballah would respond and "close down the Baabda region."

THE DELICATE EQUILIBRIUM

15. (C) Despite these developments, he remarked, there were positives to consider. First, the just-announced decision by Lebanese Forces and Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement to field a "consensus candidate" in the upcoming Baabda-Aley by-election had essentially removed that potential flashpoint from the political scene. Additionally, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt had in the last few days reduced the confrontational tone of his statements and was working for a solution to the presidential situation that would maintain peace and stability.

16. (C) But Adwan rhetorically asked, "what is the price of ridding ourselves of Lahoud?" Even though he sincerely wished to see the Syrian-imposed president gone, Adwan said he would refuse to participate in any effort if the price were instability, or if Saad Hariri insisted on influencing the choice of Lahoud's successor. In elaborating, Adwan voiced a complaint often heard in the Maronite community that the Hariri-led Sunnis "wanted it all."

A DEAL IN THE MAKING

17. (C) As a result of intensive consultations, Adwan believed a deal was possible for a peaceful, constitutional transfer of presidential power. According to Adwan, the key

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to achieving this is the Maronite patriarch, Boutros Sfeir. He acknowledged that up until this past weekend, Sfeir had discouraged precipitous change in Baabda and had been completely opposed to street demonstrations. But there had been a sea change on February 20, when the Patriarch conditionally approved demonstrations, as long as they did not lead to confrontation with other communities. This statement, because it was given in an interview with the country's Arab nationalist newspaper, as-Safir, had resonance across the political divide -- and made the idea of a parliamentary election of a new president suddenly feasible. Adwan maintained that not even Aoun would publicly oppose the Patriarch if the cleric decided on an acceptable candidate.

18. (C) In the parliament, Adwan conjectured that the March 14 majority would need an alliance with either Aoun (21 delegates), Hizballah (14 delegates), or Amal's Nabih Berri (15 delegates) to implement an agreement to replace Lahoud. "We need a deal with one of them," he reasoned. But he also acknowledged that there were many moving parts in the plan, and the timeline unwisely set in motion by Saad Hariri did not make things any easier. In an aside, he commented that Hariri's relative inexperience in politics was clearly evident in several of his recent decisions.

19. (C) Another significant unknown, particularly if the Maronite patriarch expressed support for another candidate, was whether Aoun would accept anything less than the presidency. Adwan speculated that even though Aoun has refused to even discuss the possibility, his recent discussions with the former general made him think some other participation in the government may be an option.

THREE STEPS

110. (C) Bemused about the tendency among March 14 Coalition members to get far ahead of themselves (and reality), Adwan said three steps were now needed: urge everyone to reduce heated rhetoric; convince the Patriarch that conditions were

auspicious for Lahoud to leave; and finally, convene a meeting of Christian political leaders to agree on an acceptable replacement for the president. Returning to his image of the "delicate equilibrium," MP Adwan expressed cautious optimism that with some compromise from all parties a peaceful solution was within reach.

FELTMAN